



## WARRIORS, STILL?

1991

This was the year I stood with hundreds of horrified university students in front of television sets on the campus of the University of California at Davis and watched U.S. bombs fall on Iraq. Afterward, I wrote "America's Iraq Attack and Back to the Indian Wars!" Sometime later, I published this essay in a journal I was editing and this is what I wrote more than a decade ago:

It is often said of war these days, by Americans of good intention that there are good wars, moral ones, and important ones, that there are wars which are fought for the great ideals. The other wars are bad, immoral, obscene. Traditionally, American Indians, and the Sioux in particular, who also justified war as a sacred business, know the arguments well. Whatever the justification, American Indians fought in the most recent war, Desert Storm, in great numbers just as they have served valiantly in all of this nation's military actions.

The 1991 U.S./United Nations war in the Persian Gulf against Saddam Hussein, we have been asked to believe, was one of the good wars, moral and important. Thus, it was also asked of us as American citizens that we support our troops. Because of this latter request, which we can trace to former President R. M. Nixon's attempt to dispense with any kind of public debate in the waning hours of the Vietnam struggle, a debate which many of us in the 60s and 70s thought to be necessary to a democracy both fragile and corrupt, most of us have come to fear being called traitors to our national causes, whatever they may be; and, so, we often preface our remarks with some kind of personal history. Here's mine:

I am a Dakota Sioux woman on the far side of 50 born and raised on the Crow Creek Indian Reservation. I was married there and all of my

children were born in the land of the Sioux. My only son, chu(n)skay, is now in the naval reserve; my elder brother spent 20 years in the U.S. Navy through World War II and Korea, and he never made it home alive. My father served as a private in the U.S. Army in 1916 almost a decade before he was made a citizen of what he always called an enemy nation which had signed treaties with his people and then tried so hard (and still does) to co-opt the nationhood through legislation. I was married for many years to a Minneconjou from Eagle Butte, South Dakota, who, as a teen-aged Infantryman in WWII (drafted out of the Holy Rosary Mission School at Pine Ridge) won two Bronze Stars carrying a machine gun around Germany. I am married now to a Spokane Indian who is a former Marine. One of my great-grandfathers from Crow Creek was named Bowed Head Ihanktowan and it is in the family records that he fought at the Little Big Horn with Sitting Bull and Gall.

I come, therefore, from a nation of warriors who defended this land long before any white man set foot on this continent in wars that were not wars of annihilation nor were they wars of conquest. It was only after they fought the white man that they came to know of those kinds of wars; thus, they, too, have been drawn into the debate concerning good war versus bad.

Though we as a part of the great American public are still uninformed concerning many of the details of that war, I have reached the sad conclusion that the Saudis and the Kuwaitis made a grave mistake when they invited the United States into their war, this most recent conflict which they were forced into with their Arab brothers in the middle East, a place which is many lifetimes away from mine.

Perhaps they did it because they did not have access to the appropriate Native American history. Few people do, no matter what part of the globe they inhabit. Had they done their homework in that history, they would have known that in offering such an invitation to the United States, they would never again be free of its aggression for they've now given it the chance for which it has been lying in wait: the chance to make its honorable (and sacred?) claim to the Arab oil fields. Nor will the Arabs now ever achieve parity with Israel, for that beleaguered country has now revealed its true status as a U.S. colony and the United States can now moralize its biased stance toward that country and against the Arabs as never before. Had they done their homework on the experience of the American Indians, the Saudis and Kuwaitis would have known that they now, at the close of the 20th century, have made it possible for tiny Israel, only a few decades old, to join its giant defender in redirecting and reshaping all of

the ancient Arabian destinies. For Arab kingdoms as old as those in the Gulf this may turn out to be their worst nightmare.

Many of the tribes of the Indigenes throughout the Americas, I will not name them here, made the same kinds of historical mistakes and we have become unable to live our own lives. We continue to lose our resources and riches stolen from us by our greedy benefactor, the very thieves who have given us the reputation in history of being beggars.

In the same way that his ancestors 200 years ago said war with the Indigenes was really not about some obscure tribes in the wilderness, President George H. W. Bush has always said that the recent Gulf War was not about just one small country, Kuwait. This Gulf War, he says, was about great ideas, a new world order in which many nations will come together to achieve the goals of mankind. The colonized everywhere in the world, including American Indian Nations who defend themselves on a daily basis against the powerful bureaucrats and legislators in Washington, D.C., as well as in the states in which they reside, know that there is nothing new about this world order of which he speaks. For them, it is a replay of the Old Indian Wars, after which a forceful predator may impose, confine, and cripple.

The people who believe in [the first] President Bush's new order, those Arab leaders who believe that United States intervention in their conflict is an acceptable price to pay perhaps do not know that Bush [the senior] uses the same argument for a new world order which justified the killing of Lakota women and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, a hundred years ago almost to the day that bombs began falling in the land of the Tigris and Euphrates, that place where civilization, we are told, began. He uses the argument, i.e., that the United States engages in good wars, which won the Medal of Honor for U.S. Cavalrymen who shot down defenseless Minneconjou women and children under a flag of truce one December day in 1890.

The uninformed Kuwaitis and Saudis should understand the paradoxical nature of history: that the United States which now uses the failed and tarnished argument for this war, i.e., that the strong must defend the weak in a good war, refuses to return the sacred lands in the Black Hills stolen from the Sioux in much the same manner that it has allowed the State of Israel to steal and occupy Arab lands. It is the way of history that the strong always take from the weak and get away with it. Moreover, they must remember that as rich nations spend their gold on armaments, one American child in three will not live long enough to vote in this, the greatest experiment in democracy the word has ever known. That fact,

alone, should give them important clues concerning the United States' intent and responsibility.

All of the nations of the past, one supposes, as one contemplates history, rose to empire as hard fighters, pagans, and adventurers. But none has been so successful as has the inchoate United States of America in convincing the world, and itself, of its own moral destiny, making believe that it has the right to colonize the resources of the world simply because it is good, pretending that it can impose world order on others who are bad by paying off its collaborators, declaring that it can decide who will be eligible to stake its claim and who will not.

As all of this happens, the world should remember that millions of the Indigenous have absolutely no voice in the United Nations which was so skillfully manipulated by pro-Western forces in the recent Gulf crisis and few rights in developing their own lives. The reason, we suppose, is because they are the invisible and vanishing tribes of which Frederick Jackson Turner spoke; they are the third-rate enemies of the West, the un-christianized, and the un-technologized cultures of the human species and they, therefore, deserve exclusion.

In spite of the fact that the Indigenous have heard all of the discouraging debates for centuries concerning justice in the world of nations, they continue to struggle for their so-called minority rights. The Sioux people have always known, just as the Palestinians and countless other disenfranchised peoples throughout the world have known, that colonists do not attend to the very International Law of their own making in the matter of acquiring territory and exploiting resources. None the less, the forever optimistic leaders of such people continue the struggle. In 1920, the Sioux lands claim was initiated as quickly as access to the U.S. Courts was achieved. Presto! Sixty years later (in the mere lifetime of my father, that private first-class who in 1916 served in the U.S. Army in defense of the land though he was neither U.S. citizen nor patriot) the Supreme court confirmed the Sioux claim. Yes, said the Highest Court in the land, the United States Government took your lands illegally and it will, therefore, pay you x-millions of dollars. As you might have suspected, the Sioux since 1980 have refused to accept the pay-off.

Such a refusal on the part of the Indigenous does not mean that the United States of America will stop its confiscation and occupation of Indian lands. But the Sioux know, as do the colonized of the world, that the face of immorality and the face of the powerful colonizer are one and the same.

As the Israelis refuse to return the West Bank and Gaza to its rightful own-

ers, so do Americans refuse to return lands in the Black Hills to the Sioux. It is one of the great ironies of the modern world that these two thieves went to war (though one, indeed, is an undeclared adversary) to force another thief, Saddam Hussein, into doing what neither of them will.

The Indian Wars continue.<sup>1</sup>

We know so much more now about the Babylon adventure engaged in by America than we did on that day of bombing in 1991. The decade-later invasion by the administration of the heir, George W. Bush, in 2001, sometimes referred to as "Bush 43" to distinguish him from his father, is the more frightful because we know so much more about the players. George W. Bush became the forty-third president of the United States, and his father George Herbert Walker Bush was the forty-first president, whose own father was a Republican politician from Connecticut. Each generation of the Bush male progeny was interested in the oil that other countries possessed. There is continuity, then, concerning the obsession with the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, an obsession that took on the greed and envy so well known to the antihistorical leaders who sometimes rule America and have always looked at the possessions of others with desire and acquisition in mind. Who knows this better than American Indians?

The American public had little notion in 1991 with the first bombing that the son would become the president of the United States to carry on this awful war because at that time he was merely the governor of oil-rich Texas, known for his interest in baseball and his born-again Christian redemption. "Duby," as they called him in his home state, the son of a very rich oil man who ran the CIA for many years, became president of the United States as a result of one vote in the Supreme Court; some say he rose to power in order to continue the system geared for waging a U.S. war in the Middle East. And also to avenge an assassination attempt on his father by the dictator of Iraq. It seems now to some to have been a deliberate strategy by powerful colonizers and avengers.

There were other things that the American public was unaware of, though, that perhaps we should have been. We know now, for example, as we didn't know then, that the general who led the first Gulf War in 1991 (Norman Schwarzkopf Jr.) is the son of another historical figure and friend of the Bush family, the flamboyant American soldier General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, for whom "Stormin' Norman" is named. In 1942, the senior Schwarzkopf was the head of a military mission in the Middle East performing imperialist duties for the U.S. capitalists in propping up the power base for the corrupt

Shah of Iran. It took the better part of a decade for the people of Iran to overthrow this oil-rich shah who had collaborated with the oil-rich Texans and others. It would seem, therefore, that the roots of this present war in the Middle East are very deep, indeed. American imperialists have had their eyes on the Middle East in a serious way for most of the twentieth century. It would seem, also, that American citizens (and, certainly, American Indians) are the last to know what their colonial governors are up to in remote places around the world.

We now know so much more about the subsequent occupation of Iraq by Americans than we did then, but much of its intention is still a hidden history, very much like the genocidal history of the colonization of the American Indian on this continent has been hidden from public view. We know now that when Hussein, the leader of Iraq, complained in the 1980s that Iraq's neighbor Kuwait was exceeding its oil-production quotas set up by OPEC to please its American investors, driving oil prices down, he signed his own death warrant. Kuwaitis, like the unlucky Shah of Iran, were among the most avid of OPEC leaders doing the bidding of America, so when they refused to defend the Arabian provision concerning OPEC's authority over its own oil production, they were invaded by Saddam, who claimed that Kuwait has always been a part, a province, of what is now Iraq, never mind the meddling of the British government after World War II. The most recent colonizer of Kuwait, the United States, would naturally be expected come to its rescue. And it did. Bush senior said at the time of the invasion, "This will not stand." The war for Middle East oil continued.

The American public, notorious for its lack of historical sense, knows now as it didn't know then that Kuwait had at one time been the province Basra in what is now Iraq until it was granted independence by another colonizer, the British, as late as 1961. This Alice-in-Wonderland reality of recent history in a land as old as any in the world might have been looked on with hostility by border nations as the temerity of Americans sanctioned their interference in purely economic terms. But the world and those border nations could do little in response to the actions of the powerful United States, the only elephant in the jungle since the demise of the Soviet Union.

Priorities in the Middle East in the twenty-first century as America occupies lands for oil are far different from what they were in 1877 in the new American West when the Black Hills of Dakota Territory were occupied for gold in the northern Plains of America. This means that strategic and high-tech bombing might have been the only alternative in handling the Kuwaiti situation, whereas legislation and political malfeasance may have been the

only consideration a hundred years ago in the American West. Both methods have the same source: unchecked political power.

The abuse of political authority in the American West during the settlement years could be persuasive in promoting and legalizing thefts because the Great American public benefited from each of the thefts just as it benefits from the oil wars in the Middle East. Victims, too, can be depended upon to make mistakes that invite further injustices. There are always mistakes made by the victims in history that assist in enforcing the tragedies. The mistake Iraq made was to acquiesce to colonial concerns when it was admitted to the Arab League in 1963 for the sake of being structured as a nation in the eyes of the world. The same mistake was made by Sioux Indians and the Sioux Nation, the most powerful Indian nation on the Plains in the 1800s, when it acquiesced to the Red Cloud notion of making a treaty nation that would consign itself to reservation status, a colonial paradigm of enormous controversy.

In each case, the idea of recognition from powerful nations throughout the world was a tempting rationale. This suggestion, however, simply blames the victim when, in fact, there have been few alternatives for the unprepared as they face the massing of hegemonic power by more fortunate national movements. Many historians will tell you that there have been no alternatives to the kind of aggressive colonial tactics of the First World. Continuous war, death, and disease is the historical substance of colonial aggression and imperialistic nation building.

Basic infrastructures here in New World America have not been in place for long, certainly not as long as when Europe was developing what the Roman historian Tacitus had called “imperial mentality,” the driving force for many of the earliest colonial dynasties. That ancient thinking helped England (America’s precursor) look longingly at unoccupied places like Ireland and, later, India, America, the Southern Hemisphere, and Africa. But the “imperial mentality” spoken of by the earliest scholars has been the legacy of the newly formed democracy in the New World. All that was required in 1877 in the new America was a congressional act, the Black Hills Act of 1877, and—whoosh—7.7 million acres of treaty-protected Sioux Indian lands came under the title of the United States of America, where it has been exploited, given over to settlers, and held in trust ever since. Nearly twenty years of sporadic warfare followed that theft, then poverty and submission, and finally enforced assimilation and bare survival.

The unfeeling coarseness of America has rarely been exposed because the mainstream refuses to look at the Indian-white history of the early cen-

nations, if not in theory, at least in title for economic gain. This is the way of capitalistic democracies, is it not?

How different, then, is such protestation and denial and rationale of contemporary sources from Chief Justice John Marshall's Supreme Court decision in 1832 when he said:

However extravagant the pretension of converting the discovery of an inhabited country into conquest may appear; if the principle has been converted in the first instance, and afterward sustained; if a country has been acquired and held under it; if the property of the great mass of the community originates in it, it becomes the law of the land, and cannot be questioned. So, too, with the concomitant principle, that the Indian inhabitants are to be considered merely as occupants, to be protected, indeed, while in peace, in the possession of their lands, but to be deemed incapable of transferring the absolute title to others.<sup>2</sup>

Looking carefully at this legal history is to realize that "protection" of the Iraqi citizens from Hussein and leading them to democracy is mere ruse. To the aggressive colonizer, it has always been about land and resources. It is about occupation in Iraq in 1990 and 2003, as it was about occupation in western America in 1890 and, ultimately, genocide. Some historians want to say that many of the Marshall decisions of the 1830s appeared to safeguard Indian lands from greedy developers in the capitalistic mode, but when the gold fields in the west, like the oil fields in the Middle East, shone in the eyes of the invading beholder, nothing could stop the invasion, occupation, theft, and ultimate colonization. This seems to be the nature of capitalistic democracies based in imperialism.

When the bombs fell on Iraq, first in 1990, and later in 2002, the unfortunate question, Do nations repeat their mistakes? rang in my ears. Today, as I look at the destruction of the cities of Iraq and the murder of thousands, I am reminded that continental armies of the nineteenth century left carrion remains for hundreds of miles across the Great Plains in 1870 and 1880 for many of the same reasons that Babylon lay in ruins a hundred years later: resources, a good society, liberty, and democracy; but, most important of all, for retaliation and revenge. After all, didn't they kill all those pioneers and settlers for no good reason? And, after all, didn't they kill all those innocents in the Twin Towers? Didn't they try to assassinate our oil president, George H. W. Bush? Retaliation as cause often gives war and death a realistic cast in favor of those who claim to be righteous, as those who defeated the murderous Seventh Cavalry (invaders of foreign sovereign lands) found out years

later at Wounded Knee. Yet revenge, we are often reminded by biblical folk, only makes everyone blind.

We are told that America's wars are fought by good people against bad people. But history tells us that the massive humiliation of old and traditional indigenous peoples by an invading, colonizing people, ends most often in the defeat of any hope for a democratic world that would uplift not only the Christians, but also the largely non-Christian and indigenous peoples of the globe. These historical dilemmas were never more clear to me than when I stood on that clear January day in 1991 in the company of a crowd of stunned college students on the Davis campus and watched the U.S. military bomb thousands of targets in Iraq and demand the return of Kuwaiti oil to its wealthy sheiks and the corporate heads of the U.S. economy defended by George Bush Sr. Helpless, the students and I stood as if rooted to the floor until the sun disappeared from the smiling California sky; thousands of human beings died that day and so did my hope that America's terrible history concerning the indigenes would not be repeated.

I walked slowly back to my apartment, saying to no one in particular: America will pay for this! The people of the Arabian world will never forgive this! Nor should they. That weekend, thousands of people were in the streets of San Francisco protesting the bombing but those images were flashed for only an instant on CNN and protesters were quickly repulsed. Nothing was said about what had changed in that part of the country and the emergence of the most hostile hatred toward Americans of any century. Now we are told that they hate us because they hate progress, freedom, choice, culture, and music. Such obvious falsehoods and exaggerations are unconvincing to those who have studied America's indigenous history.

Thinking now of the horror of the September 11 events in New York City and Washington, the constant minute-by-minute replaying, hour after hour, of the scenes of panic and death lasting for days and continuing even while I wrote this, I realize there is little hope that the world can move away from the current terrible moments to speak of American Indian history. The terrible Indian history is too far away to consider. The momentous demolishing of the Twin Towers in New York City a decade after the first raid makes it impossible for the newest victims of war to take into account the Indian wars that may be at the heart of America's present dilemma. Yet nothing happens on the world stage without context and the old Indian wars are the backdrop for most of the modern events of horror. The United States refuses to discuss its own century of genocide, its own theft of the sacred Black Hills, and its own crimes against humanity. It refuses to acknowledge that there is no capitalistic nation in the world that is innocent. Instead, it

uses the failed and tarnished argument that the strong must fight good wars. Everyone suffers for this lie.

At the time of the first Gulf War, I wrote in my notes: "As the Israelis refuse to return the West Bank and Gaza to its rightful owners, so, too, do Americans (told by their own Supreme Court in 1980 that they were thieves) refuse to return the lands of the Black Hills to its rightful owners who are only savages, after all, in the wilderness. Thus, the democratizers and the capitalists and the Christians have settled down in the Black Hills, the sacred lands of the Sioux and there is little to be done about it except to keep its grief in the hearts of the people. One of the great ironies of the modern world is that American thieves go to war against another thief, Saddam Hussein, to force him to do what they will not."

Their motives have been, again, hidden from those of us who ignore history. In truth, the United States had supported Hussein as an ally for decades even after they knew of his gassing of the Kurds. In the end, though, he, too, is given up and more tired proverbs about doing the right thing are disguised as history. The democratizers and capitalists will now settle down in the Middle East. There is much to be said about modern warfare, but as I listen to G. W. Bush, who claimed the U.S. presidency at the beginning of the twenty-first century, say that America will persevere in a dangerous world, I am reminded that General William Tecumseh Sherman, who led the war against the Sioux, said much the same thing: "We must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux," he said, "even to their extermination, men, women, and children."<sup>3</sup> Wars based in such determined aggression are never done and, for the rest of our lives, those of us who mourn the loss of sacred ground will feel a constant burden because we are the First Americans, people with large and poignant dreams.

• • •

#### REMEMBERING THE SPIRIT AND THE LAND IN THE TIME OF SITTING BULL—EVERY PEOPLE HAS A RIVER

From Appomattox to Wounded Knee  
the same white men went about  
celebrating their own jury's verdict:

occupy Manila, recapture Geronimo  
invade Cuba,  
speaking words of pious  
real estate agents: *we fill*  
*them with good ideas*  
*so we can take their lands.*

Imagine for a moment  
 the bandit nation holding its breath  
 in quiet ravines above Grand River  
 committing justifiable homicide,  
 killing Indians as it would kill  
 snakes or coyotes or prairie chickens  
 Imagine the sun driving the horizon shelf  
 out of sight again  
 and again  
 above dirty water  
 dark water until  
 it ran crimson over the makeshift bridge  
 Imagine the dangers even then  
 a layer of dust would settle  
 like the sunset curving the earth  
 in a gesture called the sign of the cross  
 to make a place for the magic words of pious  
 poets: *we cover the scars of a new nation*  
*staining the glass windows of a moveable river current*  
*with the promises of Paradise.*

He saw the flash of a bullet  
 in the dusk as he walked  
 not a hundred yards from the Grand River  
 Imagine there was always the Army  
 as the empire expanded. There was  
 always the Army looking into the  
 impervious shine of the Grand River  
 reflecting itself in the pious words  
 of Majors and Generals: *they shall see*  
*that there is malice enough in our hearts.*

Imagine Indians  
 hunted like wild beasts along the  
 sun-drenched river beds  
 smoke on every horizon  
 the wounded lying in the bushes  
 unable to run  
 or regret  
*oha(n)h*      you've got the picture.<sup>4</sup>

## WAR

So many Indian narratives and poems are about war . . . so many wars, too many; especially now, because this time, young men and women go to war in the midst of lies and deceptions; this time, then, the aim of the most powerful nation in the world might not be on the right target, and Indians, who fight in these wars in great numbers, continue to try to tell the stories of their bravery. The language of this colonial war begun by this powerful nation, America, unlike the language of other wars known by indigenous peoples, becomes illusive, hidden, ambiguous.

All targets these days are, with malice, indiscriminately called “terrorists,” unarmed persons can be called “combatants,” dissidents can be arrested while merely walking the streets, innocents can be shot without warning, and loudmouthed radio jocks in favor of a president who obscures the truth and believes in preemptive war sow ruin on Clear Channel and Fox News in the land of the free, the home of the brave.

If anyone who knows the history of the Indian wars of America is not surprised at this turn of events, they nonetheless know that such historical narratives can’t help but inspire the memory of colonial wars against the natives of this continent, wars based on genocide and greed.

One of the excessive targets in this war was Ahmed Yassin, an old man and respected spiritual leader of the Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula and since 1987 a founder of an Islamic resistance movement called Hamas. On March 21, 2004, he was assassinated by helicopter gunfire in the Gaza Strip, shot down in cold blood as his family and relatives watched the occupying force of Israelis murder him on his own homeland.

As a student of obscure histories, I am reminded of thousands of such assassinations on the Sioux Homelands a hundred years ago; most particularly, the assassination of a Hunkpapa spiritual leader and resistance fighter of the Oyate murdered by American firepower on a bright, crisp December day in 1890 on his own homeland just a few miles from the Grand River. He was one of many old men of indigenous power who had to be taken out if occupation and colonization was to succeed.

War against enemies is not unknown to the Sioux, about whom it is often said that war was and is what N. Scott Momaday calls “a sacred business.” These days, every *wacipi* begins with an honor song to the Indian veterans who have earned the respect and admiration of all the world as hard fighters and defenders of the land. As I listen to the grandfather songs these days, I am worried that the awfulness of this Gulf War, which is a colonial war against

an indigenous people in the Middle East, is one that will be remembered by all of us as war by occupiers against the wrong and illusive target.

War was not always like this. In the six months after Pearl Harbor was attacked by the nation of Japan, over 7,500 American Indians entered the military; my only brother, Victor, was one of them and he didn't make it back home. Ninety-nine percent of all eligible Indian men registered for the draft in those days, setting a national standard. The young man who was to become the father of my children, Melvin Paul Traversie Cook from Eagle Butte, was drafted out of Holy Rosary Mission where he was a student to carry a machine gun around Germany, closing out his teenage years as a defender of the country that stole the Black Hills from his people. War is always a complicated business, as we all found out in Vietnam where 42,500 American Indians served this nation proudly. More recently, 3,000 fought in the first Gulf War, which lasted not a dozen years, but only a few days. This latest Gulf War, it is reported, is being fought by thousands of young American Indians. In our confusion and grief, we sing songs to their honor at every tribal gathering.

This war has long tentacles. The pretext that Israel, a USA satellite in the Middle East, uses to kill Palestinians in this war is the same pretext that Americans used to capture and destroy Indians a hundred years ago: well, they killed all those settlers, didn't they? All those innocent women and children who might suffer at the hands of Indians; well, they are dangerous people who refuse to love those who have come to occupy their territories and make them Christians; yes, they have murderous weapons. The pretext to kill Ahmed Yassin as a dangerous religious fanatic is the same pretext they used to kill Sitting Bull: a greasy savage who revered the ghost dance.

Every nation has a right to defend its citizens and its land, but no nation should any longer accept the morality of Western colonialism. All you have to do is look around Indian Country to know that liberation movements, such as the one that Sitting Bull led against the federal policy that was making beggars of his people, will continue even in the face of lies and manipulations, documentaries, and bad reviews. Resistance movements like Hamas and even the mujahedeen are historical, indigenous, and difficult, and they will continue.

This war, led by ahistorical schoolboy cheerleader George W. Bush, is being discredited as a fatal and fraudulent lie because it is directed at wrong targets and shadowy memories. Maybe it is true, what that old dropper of atomic bombs, Harry Truman, once said: *There is nothing new in this world except the history you don't know.*

## A CASE IN POINT

It is one of the astonishing realities of contemporary Indian life that there has been almost no organized Indian voice against either of the Gulf Wars fought by this country in the past two decades. Perhaps that has been true of all of the recent contemporary wars fought by the United States against others in which natives in great numbers have participated, with the possible exception of the Vietnam War.

The recent case of Ward Churchill, which is the only example of a voice claiming to be an Indian voice rising up against the current war, seems to be inauthentic and it is nothing if not ironic. In the process of this voicing, it was revealed that Churchill possesses no birthright as an Indian citizen of any Indian nation in the United States and, thus, has been set upon as a fraud by his fellow scholars and students, Indians and non-Indians alike.

One of the most bombastic of ethnic studies professors housed for years at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and a longtime claimant to Indian heritage, Churchill spoke with his usual authority in presenting “the Indian voice” by publishing an essay in which he compared the oppressive nature of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East to the long-colonized and oppressive behavior of the United States toward Indian nations. His suggestion was that American Indians in the United States may be the only populations in this country who have a parallel history to impart concerning the current Iraq situation of invasion, colonization, and occupation.

Lots of people agree with that assessment; however, in trying to articulate this comparison, he clumsily called the people killed in the World Trade Center attack on September 11 in New York “little Eichmanns,” intimating that by going to work every day in the Trade Center, they, like the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann who persecuted the Jews in World War II, kept the machinery of war and colonialism and fascism well oiled. His point was that the site of the attack was symbolic and should be taken note of. It was the World Trade Center that was taken down by the terrorists, after all, not the New York Public Library or the high-class homes and apartments in Manhattan’s Tribeca neighborhood. In other words, the work done at the World Trade Center, in general terms, Churchill suggested, feeds into and contributes to the worldwide technologies that makes the first-strike war now being waged against Iraq possible. If the United States is going to throw its weight around, he said, people are going to “strike back.” This “coming home to roost” essay also referenced the Black Power slogan of several decades ago that was used then as an explanation for the race riots in the large cities of America.

The response to the essay ignited all sorts of dilemmas, all kinds of seeming contradictions. Most poignant, Churchill was outed as a man who had for years desperately wanted to be an Indian, had loudly made the fraudulent claim to be a Cherokee Indian and joined the American Indian Movement of the 1970s, and had very probably gotten the job at the university in the Ethnic Studies Department by claiming that identity criterion for which he could offer no satisfactory proof. Professor Churchill is a man who has spoken out against colonialism all of his professional life and has often attacked traditional modes of history and research in order to achieve what he sees as the new, realistic story of America, a reality that had not made him popular with the academic mainstream even before his latest blast.<sup>5</sup>

After his essay came to light, several Colorado newspapers, right-wing Colorado politicians, and even the state's Republican governor took umbrage at what they saw as Churchill's slander of the innocent victims of the terrorist attack and decided to make an example of what they considered heresy emerging from the intellectual groves of independent thought on the subject of war. Many called for his firing, and a vigorous investigation ensued.

American Indian university faculty members, many of whom may have been in agreement with Churchill on this very subject, had been until this time curiously silent toward the unprovoked invasion of a sovereign country and the newly described first-strike American war policy in the Middle East. There was the notion that the most obvious system where independent thought is said to be the coin of the realm—that is, the university system—found itself under attack by mostly right-wing defenders of the war policy. Stifling mechanisms were suddenly becoming the rule, allowing the attack media and the loudmouthed talk shows, rather than institutions of higher learning, to be constructs of opinion and information.

Amid the Colorado controversy, Columbia University began an investigation of what was being called “anti-Semitism and pro-Palestinian bias” in December 2004, and as it was going forward, several professors there were under scrutiny, if not official investigation. Across the academic landscape, then, professors of Islamic religions were said to be undergoing reevaluation, if not officially, at least privately. Pro-Jewish activists from Columbia and its sister school Barnard publicly claimed they were being “intimidated” and “abused” by faculty members of the Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures Department (MEALAC).

The takeaway message given by the highly publicized right wing on this controversy was that university faculty members on the public dole are not being paid with taxpayer’s money to interrogate the international role of the

United States in Middle Eastern affairs, and especially noticeable are those scholars and professors of “color” or those involved in what may be called “ethnic” studies who are expected to keep silent on such matters. Not since academics first tried to teach evolution as a theory of origin had there been such an attack on the freedom to have an unpopular opinion. Not since Senator Joe McCarthy from Wisconsin ruined the academic, professional, and artistic reputations of hundreds of Americans in the mid-50s had there been such a highly charged public grievance against the freedom to have an offensive opinion put into the public forum.

Ironies abound in this controversy, none more profound than the fact that the academic construct of “ethnic studies” hired Churchill in the first place. This academic construct has always failed to account for the legal and indigenous treaty status of Indians representing the very faulty construct that had allowed Churchill to claim to “be an Indian” for most of his professional life. Universities, never having required tribal citizenship papers to prove that an applicant is a member of a federally recognized, sovereign Indian nation, just requests that a person “check off the ethnic/racial box” on any application form and lets it go at that. No other citizenship identification requirement in any country would pass such a slipshod method.

Most Indians in academia have rejected this “mainstream” perception of their status, adhering to the idea that it is a fact that tribal nations have never given up their right to say who their citizens are in spite of the so-called blood quantum methodology of which Churchill has been particularly contemptuous. In an interview published in the June 10, 2005, issue of the *Rocky Mountain News*, Churchill cited three criteria for his claim to Indianness: (1) self-identification; (2) acceptance within an Indian community; and (3) tribal affiliation, none of which require proof of Indian parentage. The one he didn’t cite was the naming of an actual Indian ancestor. Ultimately, in regard to the third criterion, the Keetoowah Cherokees said he was merely an “honorary” member because when he applied for enrollment, he could not prove any Cherokee ancestry.

In other interviews, Churchill traced what has been called “family lore,” the story that his mother and his grandmother told him of his Indian heritage when he was ten years old. Lakota activist Russell Means entered the increasingly comical dialogue by saying that “Ward is my brother. Ward has followed the ways of indigenous peoples worldwide.”<sup>6</sup> In spite of this ringing endorsement, much of the ensuing investigative activity ended up revealing the clear picture that Churchill has no demonstrable Indian blood.

What does all this have to do with war and the killing of innocents? Well,

like I said, ironies abound. Some of us born and raised on Indian reservations in past eras can remember when nobody, not even Indians, wanted to be Indians. Now, in some kind of perverse ironic twist, poststructuralists, postmoderns, intellectual hybrids, postcolonialists, and latent cowboys from Deadwood are claiming their own places on the basis of some kind of universalist articulation of indigenousness. After all, what American (with the possible exception of Dick Cheney) wants to be called an imperialist?

The American Indian Professoriate, an organization formed in the early 1990s and comprised of tribal citizens in academia, published a position paper in an Indian Studies journal, the *Wicazo Sa Review*, on the issue of fraudulent Indian identities, and called for institutions to require documentation of citizenship. It is a move that has gone largely unnoticed by university administrators.

Churchill's claim to Indianness, in spite of the continuing and valiant effort he has made to function as an advocacy historian for the American Indian experience, is the final revelation of his perverse fidelity to an unprovable and very weary identity issue; perverse because stealing tribal identities is every bit as damaging to tribal communities as stealing tribal lands or children or resources. Such theft, indeed, may be the ultimate racist act, an act of invasion and occupation that parallels the very acts of war by the United States that Churchill finds so egregious.

It may be that *identity theft is the crime of significance here*, not an agonizing first-strike war, not plagiarism, not falsifying identity to get cushy university positions, not bad research habits, not even slander. In the end, the whole unfortunate episode may serve only to assist conservatives in their proclaimed efforts at "retaking the university"—and that would be a blow to the fine academic and scholarly work toward decolonization and undoing racism that thoughtful native scholars have done over the past three decades. William F. Buckley Jr., David Horowitz, Saul Bellow, Allan Bloom, and the Collegiate Network may be the winners if this movement to expunge unpopular ideas goes any further.

### INTRICATE WAR HISTORIES

Everyone reading this knows that the ghosts of America's racial history are everywhere in academics, art, literature, politics, and law; and I have said it enough times and written it enough times to be able to say that nowhere are these ghosts more visible than in the lives of American Indians, both past and present. I know that, not just because I keep repeating it, but because

I was born a Dakota Sioux Indian on an Indian reservation, one of those places fraught with poverty and challenge, in the twentieth century, born into colonialism without really realizing the condition of colonialism for many decades. I was born and raised just in those few years when the Indian Reorganization Act was being passed and enacted. I was in college when the termination and relocation laws were passed and a young parent when Wounded Knee was revisited in 1973, igniting what amounted to a reassessment of history. But, that being said, the truth is, America knows very little about what it means to be born an Indian in America.

What is accepted by Americans is that it is an anticolonial country going about “freeing” others and promoting democracy around the world, promoting “rescue missions” in other sovereign territories for people “less fortunate.” The truth about American history is this: *America is the first settler-colonial country to achieve great power in our time*, its power emerging from its earliest days as it spread political terrorism against the tribal nations; as it stole civilian and tribal property; as it coerced the support of its victims, turning them into proxies for their own agendas; as it eroded citizens’ rights in tribal enclaves; as it committed atrocities among civilian populations; and as it claimed its political cover when the places of the victims became the breeding ground for chaos.

All Lakotas and Dakotas know that political and economic terror was a strategy that the United States embraced after the Custer defeat out there on the Powder River and the Little Big Horn, and it has continued that strategy ever since. The first terrorist organization that the Lakotas and Dakotas faced began right here in our midst, in little towns like the Western icon, Deadwood, South Dakota, and the hay camps of the West where terrorists disguised as cowboys and farmers and bankers, ministers and lawyers and politicians managed through the malfeasance of government and the oppression of religious education to overthrow the native and steal his land.

Ever since that time, nonhistorical nations like the Sioux Nation or the Navajo Nation or the other native confederacies of this continent were treated as though they had no citizens’ rights, neither in the United States nor in their tribal nations. Their non-Christian religions were thought to be reactionary instead of expressions of culture; so the biggest power in the world became the most brash violator of human rights all the while accusing others of that crime. This strategy for supremacy has been a most successful endeavor and now the United States is the single global power frighteningly disguised as a benign democracy. I write pieces like this and books like this because *I want this power to be held accountable*. I want America to know that there is

a difference between human rights and citizens' rights, and that the rights of longtime, ancestral citizens of the sovereign Sioux Nation have been not just eroded, but trampled to death in the past hundred years.

I begin by saying that it is my longtime interest here to explore racial politics, and Indian nationhood, and history. I want to explore the colonization of American Indian tribes as a devastating policy in the United States since its inception. This exploration is related to the present condition of war, this new colonial war in the Middle East, something Indians know something about.

In order to grasp the fundamentals of the position taken here, the condition of indigenous peoples should be clarified. American Indians claim a political status in the United States like no other population in this country. Indians are not "minorities." Indians are not "people of color," neither vanishing nor savage; Indians possess a dual citizenship that they have never given up, tribally specific citizenship as well as U.S. citizenship, ever since the United States conferred its citizenship on Indians in 1924 through legislation. The thing that was remembered in this strategy to make Indians proxies was that Indians had signed treaties as nations of people with the United States and other nations, namely France, England, and Holland, and had fought hard and successful wars in their own defense. Thus, Indians are not immigrants or colonizers or slaves or tourists. And, in the beginning, they were not Christians, either; had never been Christians in the thousands of years of the making of their civilizations before the missionaries came, came as though they were welcome.

Anti-Indianism, in my view, the subject of my latest book and a word that others use as synonymous with "racism," is a concept that has risen out of that status. It is a concept in American Christian life just as anti-Semitism is a concept that rises out of Christian Europe and Islamophobia is a concept that rises out of global Christian nations, and anti-Africanism rises out of the same sources. Practically speaking, however, the dialogue as it concerns indigenous peoples lies somewhere outside of the usual context of racism in America; that is, the black-white dialogue that has been the focus ever since the Civil War, and the "people of color" dialogue that rises out of more recent experience. These misunderstandings allow "wannabes" to emerge and claim Indianness. They encourage the rise of colonial tactics, the recent Middle East adventure the most shocking.

For those who examine history, it seems obvious that colonizing nations have concomitant histories, yet there is often great denial of that reality, which accounts for the erosion of understanding of current events. As early

as 1917, during what we students of Indian history in America call the "years of attrition" when hundreds of thousands of American Indians were dying of starvation and disease, the British government in the Balfour Declaration wanted to create a Jewish state in a land occupied by Palestinians (Arabs and non-Christians), forcing an intrusion into a foreign land, very much like the American invasion of the 1800s when white settlers forced their way through government policy to occupy Indian treaty-protected lands in America.

The second World War made this idea of creating a Jewish state palatable because the Germans and the rest of the European world refused to share with the Jewish people their fates and their victories and their failures. The second World War also made it possible to abandon any real discussion of the American Indian's fate. By 1948, the state of Israel was founded and now (after years of missteps of all kinds) can best be described as a non-Arab intrusion, a non-Arab client to its benefactors, Britain and America; a non-Muslim and nonindigenous state deeply despised by its neighbors for its unwelcome intrusion. A decade after the Balfour Declaration, America passed its own law, the Indian Reorganization Act, which created Western-type governments on Indian lands in the United States. In many ways, these governments, if not despised by the people, are notoriously weak and ineffectual, largely bound by colonial intrusion and doing the bidding of the United States on Indian treaty lands.

War with indigenous peoples and its terrible aftermath has been, for America, a most successful phenomenon. That does not mean that they won the wars they fought with tribal peoples, but it means, rather, that they used the chaos of war and its aftermath to do two things: (1) to erode citizens' rights in the tribal nation and (2) to turn victims into proxies to be used by certain power groups with their own agendas. (The so-called tribal police force that killed Sitting Bull in what has been called Dakota Territory comes to mind.) At the turn of the twenty-first century, the indigenous war in Iraq, claimed by the United States to be a defensive war but that was in actuality a preemptive strike, has highlights that remind American Indians of the wars against them a hundred years ago.

One of the highlights of this comparison is the body of law that is being laid down by U.S. forces in Baghdad as I am writing this manuscript. For example, a law passed for Iraq's future in September 2003 by the U.S. powers planning commission in Washington, D.C., opened up Iraq's economy to foreign ownership, one of the first acts initiated even as the bombs were falling. This is an astonishing colonial tactic that has brought about much of the insurgency shown daily on U.S. television. This law in Iraq parallels the

1886 General Allotment Act of the U.S. Congress, which opened up hundreds of thousands of acres of native treaty lands to others, encouraged settlement by non-Indians, and resulted in the loss to Indians of two-thirds of all treaty land title. This act made beggars of every tribe in the country and is the source, today, of endemic poverty. It will do the same in Iraq. These acts, in case anyone wants to give a name to them, are acts of genocide.

Today's war, just like the wars against tribal peoples in America, is brought about by the kind of colonial law that should be seen as criminal acts by the United States, now embedded in the creation of a new constitution being written by and for the Iraqis. It is much like the illegal Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) constitutions that were written by and for American tribal nations a mere eighty years ago. Independent regulators have been put in place in Iraq by U.S. leaders and, more important, fourteen military bases are being built on Iraqi lands housing 110,000 U.S. soldiers (many of them black and native), who will likely be there permanently with more on the way. These bases are called "enduring bases."

This parallels the occupying military force stationed at forts on every Indian reservation in America since 1880. Most of these forts still exist. As previously mentioned, I was born in a public health facility at one of these forts, born into colonialism on an Indian reservation in the 1930s at a place named Fort Thompson, named, in 1863, after an army general who was a military occupier long before I appeared on the scene, a man whose influence has lasted even into present time.

Colonial tactics have remained fairly constant throughout history and they should be recognized today as strategies to diminish freedom for innocent and sovereign peoples. One of the aspects of this history that makes it crucial for all Americans to ponder is that certain political assumptions on the part of the United States reflected during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are with us today. The foremost of these assumptions on the part of the United States are racial superiority felt by whites, the innocence of colonization felt by all capitalists, and the righteousness felt by all Christians—all assumptions that allow and encourage the United States to use its power to enforce its vision of itself as the indispensable democracy.<sup>7</sup>